

# **Humanism in schools: Italian humanists as teachers in the 15th century**

## **Ragusa and Dalmatian communes**

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During the 15th century a large number of Italian humanists came to the cities on the Eastern Adriatic coast, where they worked as notaries, chancellors or teachers. Archival sources show that communal governments of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and Dalmatian cities Split, Trogir and Zadar tried to bring to their communal schools good teachers who would teach Latin grammar as well as some new subjects, thus slowly implementing new principles of *studia humanitatis*. Although at that time Ragusa was the only independent city-state on the Eastern Adriatic coast, there were many similarities in the development of communal schooling and education in Ragusa and the Dalmatian cities which were under the Venetian government from the beginning of the 15th century. One of the reasons for that is the mobility of Italian school teachers. In the first part of this paper I will give an overview of the beginnings of communal schooling in Ragusa and Dalmatian communes. In the second part, by focusing on the lives of four Italian teachers who worked in Ragusa, Split, Trogir and Zadar, I will point to the importance of humanistic teachers for the development of humanism on the Eastern Adriatic coast.

### **Communal schools in the 15th century**

We can trace the beginning of the organised communal schooling in Ragusa and Dalmatian cities in the archival records from the first half of the 14th century. In Ragusa, the first mention of an officially appointed teacher by a communal council dates from 1333. *Magister grammaticus* Nicholas from Verona was supposed to teach boys „grammar and other sciences he knows and how to write”. One document from Zadar mentions in 1377 that the appointed communal teacher was *doctor grammaticae* Peter from Bologna. From that time onward, in Ragusa and Dalmatian cities, councils' decisions and minutes regularly mention names of the teachers. The majority of them were from Italy, and only a small number of appointed school teachers were local people - priests or laymen who studied in Italy and returned to their home cities.

In Ragusa during the 15th century the Senate or the Minor Council had the right of appointing teachers, but in Dalmatian cities only the Venetian count had that right. Communal councils could only suggest a teacher to the count, but could not appoint one. Teachers were first appointed for the period of two years. If they wanted to stay longer, they had to ask the city council for the renewal of their contract. Some teachers resigned sooner, usually because they would get a better offer, which often meant higher salary.

The quality of a teacher normally depended on the money that communal government could afford to pay. In Ragusa and Dalmatian cities school teachers were *salaricati*: they were paid by the commune, just like notaries, physicians, and chancellors. Ragusan teachers had the best financial status. In Dalmatian cities, the Venetian government took the control of communal incomes and fixed the annual sum for the salaries of communal employees. In Zadar, for example, the sum of 600 ducats was divided in the following manner: the physician would get 260 ducats; the surgeon 150; the school teacher 110; the notary for civil proceedings 50 and the notary for criminal proceedings 14 ducats. It was only in Ragusa that pupils did not have to pay extra money to the teacher, but that practice mainly remained in all Dalmatian cities through the 15th century. For example, the city council of Zadar decided in 1446 that students who wished to learn rhetoric should pay the teacher two ducats per year.

During the 15th century communal governments made a lot of effort to bring a good teacher to their city. Local noblemen were often asked to look for a teacher in Italy. In 1465, the Ragusan Minor Council decided that teacher could be brought from elsewhere if it proved impossible to find him in Italy, but only if he were Italian and „*scientia, virtutibus, moribusque ornatus*”. Although the school attendance was still not an obligation, the city council records show that noblemen and citizens were strongly advised and even forced to send their sons to the communal school to be educated only by the appointed communal teacher. In order to fight illiteracy, Ragusan government decided in 1455 that no patrician could hold a position in or outside the city unless he was able to read and write. City councils of Dalmatian communes did not reach that decision until the middle of the 16th century.

The school programme in Ragusa and Dalmatian cities often depended on the teacher's skills. The council's decisions regarding teachers' appointments usually mention that they were supposed to teach reading and writing, *Donatus, virtutes et bonos mores*. Something about the school programme might even be read from teachers' titles: some of them were called *professor gramaticae*, the others *artium doctor*. With the arrival of more educated Italian humanists new subjects like rhetoric, logic, philosophy and even Greek were introduced into the communal schooling curriculum.

### **Philippus de Diversis**

The full development of the communal school in Ragusa begins in 1434 with the arrival of the humanist teacher Philippus de Diversis de Quartigianis. Although Diversi spent most of his life working in Venice, it is the Ragusan episode that brought him fame for in 1440 he wrote “The description of position, buildings, rule and praiseworthy customs of the famous City of Ragusa”, one of the most important narrative sources for the history of Dubrovnik.

We know only a few data about his life before his teaching career in Ragusa. His family originated from Lucca, and probably belonged to the Luccan nobility, although Philippus himself added the noble surname de Quartigianis. Because of some political issues his family was exiled from Lucca and found its new home in Venice where Diversi probably was educated. In 1421 sources mention him for the first time as *rector scholarum* in the *sestiere* of Saint Paul. Attracted by the good salary promised by the Ragusan patricians (around 450 Ragusan perpers or 180 ducats) he came to Ragusa in June 1434 to “teach young men and adolescents science and good manners which they lacked a lot, and still do” as he says in his “Description of Ragusa”.

Dissatisfied with the status of the communal school he came upon in Ragusa, Diversi requested the Ragusan government to make some improvements. The first one was finding the permanent location for the communal school. In 1435 a comfortable, two-floor building in the city centre was furnished for school purposes. Probably also on Diversi’s incentive the Major Council voted the same year *Ordo pro magistris scholarum et scholaribus*. In that document, Diversi is referred to as “a teacher of grammar, rhetoric, logic and philosophy” and as such should only teach these subjects to “adult and non-adult pupils”. The other teacher was supposed to teach basic grammar and arithmetic. Ragusan government thus divided communal schooling into primary and secondary education.

In spite of all the changes made in the schooling system, Diversi was not very pleased with his status in Ragusa. He said in the “Description of Ragusa” that his friends had advised him not to leave Venice, where he was honoured and respected. He complained to the Ragusan government several times. After two years of service he asked for a raise, but the government did not give him as much as he wanted. He hoped for more assistant teachers (or *repetitores*) so that he could only teach “*bonas scientias*”. The Ragusan government was not very pleased with Diversi’s complaints. In addition, Diversi often travelled to Venice and stayed there for several months, so that the government had to appoint substitute teachers. In 1441, Diversi finally resigned and left Ragusa. He went back to Venice, where he continued his teaching career in the *sestiere* of Saint Paul.

### **Stephanus Fliscus (Stefano Fieschi)**

There are no precise records about what happened with the Ragusan school after Diversi left Ragusa, until 1444 when Stephanus Fliscus was named *rector scholarum*. Fliscus was born in Soncino at the beginning of the 15th century. From his letters we know that he called himself *trivii doctor*. He was a student of Gasparino Barzizza, perhaps as a young man, but certainly in 1430 as he wrote in one of his letters. That is the only information we have about his education. Before studying with Barzizza, Fliscus was in Normandy where he worked from 1424 for about five years as secretary to an Italian bishop.

From 1436 we can trace Fliscus in Dalmatia. In November that year the city council of Trogir suggested that Fliscus should be appointed “*magister et rector scollarum*” for the period of two years. Council records refer to him as “*vir peritissimus et doctissimus*”. At the time of his appointment Fliscus was still not present in Trogir, because he was supposed to start teaching as soon as he reached the city. We do not know when Fliscus finally came to Trogir, and how long he stayed there.

The next record we have about Fliscus is from Ragusa where he was chancellor in 1441, and in 1444 he became *rector* of the communal school. Although he held that position until 1459, we know very little about his life in Ragusa. In 1453 his father Manfredus died there after he had been living with him for a while. The same year Fliscus wrote twelve letters “*Ad christianos principes*”, warning them about the Turkish danger. In the letter addressed to the Hungarian king he spoke well about Ragusa and the Ragusans and signed it as “*rector studii magnifice comunitatis civitatis Ragusii*”. All this could indicate that Fliscus was probably satisfied with his life and position in Ragusa. It is possible that some records about Fliscus can still be found in the communal archives of both Trogir and Ragusa, which requires further investigation.

Apart from his letters, as experienced teacher and secretary Fliscus wrote several works on grammar and rhetoric. The greatest success was achieved by his book *De prosynonymis or Synonyma sententiarum*. In the preface Fliscus wrote that he had wanted to help „boys and youths” how to write letters and orations and to avoid „barbarisms”. The book consists of a large number of phrase sentences. Each one is written in Italian and then followed with several variations in Latin that could be inserted into letters and orations. His book is one of the first phrase books of humanistic rhetoric, and although it did not meet high humanistic Latin standards it was very popular among students because of its simplicity. The book thus survives in over twenty manuscripts, almost forty incunabular printings and several sixteenth century editions. In several editions it was published under the title *De componendis*

*epistolis*. Fliscus' book was very useful to non-Italian students and was adapted for them: in some editions Italian sentences were substituted with German, French, Spanish and Dutch.

### **Tideo Acciarini**

The next two teachers I will speak about taught at least in three different cities on the Eastern Adriatic coast in their long teaching career. The first one is Tideo Acciarini. He was born in Sant'Elpidio in Marche between 1430 and 1440. Before his teaching career in Dalmatia, Acciarini was teaching the children of Alessandro Sforza in his court in Pesaro. Two of his works are preserved: *Carmina* and a treatise *De animorum medicamentis*.

His first teaching position in Dalmatia was in Split, from 1469 until 1471 for certain, but presumably even earlier. Acciarini was probably much respected there because in one document he is titled as “*praestans et eruditissimus, egregius et doctissimus rector scholarum*”. In Split, Acciarini was the teacher of young Marko Marulić, one of the most famous Croatian writers. Probably on his incentive Marulić wrote a Latin epistle to the poet and humanist from Šibenik Juraj Šižgorić (Georgius Sisgoreus), Acciarini's friend and correspondent. Marulić's epistle was included in Šižgorić's book *Elegiarum et carminum libri tres* printed in Venice in 1477, alongside Šižgorić's poem dedicated to Acciarini, and Acciarini's reply letter to the poem. It is interesting to note that Marulić's epistle to Šižgorić was his first published printed work.

After Split, Acciarini was a teacher in Zadar for a short period around 1475. The city council of Zadar was not pleased because Acciarini first hired a priest as an assistant (*repetitor*) and then soon left to teach in Ragusa, leaving his *repetitor* who - without necessary qualification – ended up as the only teacher in the city.

From 1477 to 1480 Acciarini was *rector scholarum* in Ragusa, where he had two *repetitores* and several students who later became famous Ragusan writers. One of them was poet Ilija Crijević (Elio Lampridio Cerva). Crijević was also a famous humanist. After finishing his education in the Ragusan communal school, he went on to study in the Roman Academy of Pomponio Leto where he was crowned as *poeta laureatus*. From 1497 until 1504 and from 1510 until 1520, Crijević also held the position of *rector scholarum* in Ragusa.

### **Palladius Fuscus**

Palladius Fuscus, a fellow teacher, praised Crijević's poems in his treatise *De situ orae Illyrici*. It is possible that the two humanists knew each other from Leto's Academy. Fuscus was born in Padua around 1450 in the noble family de Negri. He was educated in

Padua where he probably studied civil and canon law. Later on he might have attended lectures in *studia humanitatis* in Florence, Venice and Rome and studied Greek. Presumably in Padua Fuscus made the acquaintance of several Dalmatian humanists who probably invited him to come and teach in Dalmatia. There he spent almost forty years of his life and career.

His first teaching position in Dalmatia was probably in Šibenik, between 1475 and 1480, although there are no sufficient archival sources to confirm that. In 1480 Fuscus moved to Trogir, where he was named *rector scholarum*. He was probably invited to come and teach there by his friend, the famous nobleman Koriolan Cippico (Coriolanus Cepio). To his son Aloysius, and also his friend, Fuscus dedicated a poem when Aloysius became the bishop of Famagosta. Despite his influential friends and the respect he had in Trogir, from a letter by his correspondent Marcus Sabellicus it appears that Fuscus had some doubts about his teaching career. Teaching pupils seemed like a waste of time to him; he hoped he could go to Rome and dedicate his time to writing.

However, Fuscus remained in Dalmatia and in 1493 went to Zadar. Archival records show that he pursued two careers in Zadar: he was a *rector sallariatus scholarum Jaderae*, but he also worked as a *cancellarius ad criminalia*, a notary for criminal proceedings. During his stay in Zadar, Fuscus was working on two of his major works. The first one is his edition of Catullus' *Carmina*, with his commentaries. The book was printed in Venice in 1496. Fuscus used the oldest manuscript of *Carmina* for this edition, and also gave some new readings of Catullus' text. The other text was his treatise *De situ orae Illyrici*. The work was first published in Rome in 1540, thanks to Fuscus' pupil Bartolomeo Fonte, who wanted to save his teacher's works from oblivion.

In 1516 Fuscus left Zadar and went to Capodistria, perhaps because of the animosity of his successor as *rector scholarum*, Nardinus Celinensis, who wrote two invectives against him. The reasons for this animosity are unknown. Fuscus remained his teaching career in Capodistria until his death in 1520 of the effects of a stroke suffered while he was teaching.

To conclude: although we still lack a lot of data which makes further archival investigation necessary, we can say that despite all the financial difficulties, the communal schooling in Ragusa and Dalmatian cities during the 15th century did develop. As the chosen examples of four famous Italian humanists show, one of the most important reasons for that was the mobility of Italian school teachers. It was not always easy for the communal governments to hire a good and highly educated teacher, but having one could make a difference. Mostly through education, humanism came to the Eastern Adriatic coast and thus helped in forming the local humanistic circles.